Using Screencasts as Instructional Tools

Based on student preferences, Carnegie Mellon University's (CMU) Career & Professional Development Center has created a series of instructional videos for students using screencast technology. In this case, screencasts are video captures of a computer screen with a voiceover used to instruct students how to do a career-center related task.

"I am amazed by how much YouTube has changed the way we seek and learn new information," says Kevin Monahan, CMU's associate dean of student affairs for career and professional development. "A colleague used YouTube videos to learn how to set up an engagement dashboard for his office and another used videos to understand how to use Excel macros. Our students expect to find resources online; this generation uses YouTube as an instruction manual of sorts for many of their questions."

This and feedback from students who said directions on the center's website were too text-heavy led Monahan to explore using screencasting as an instructional tool.

"Our screencasts are quick, and satisfy both visual and auditory learners," Monahan says. "Through a screencast, we can show someone how to do something instead of merely telling them how to do it."

The screencasts are available on CMU's career center website and on the center's YouTube Channel.

Monahan offers several tips for creating effective screencasts:

Be Brief—Screencast videos should be one to two minutes in length and should focus on one task.

Be Clear—The screencast's learning objective should be clear. To keep it short, yet effective, the topic should be fairly narrow in focus and task-oriented. Sample topics include how to schedule an appointment with the career center (www.youtube.com/watch?v=XCCJW72pMDg) or how to sign up for job shadowing (www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tq5px-SP0hM).

Be Creative—When students send Monahan resumes to review, he not only inserts comments into the text, he also makes a screencast of his review so he can emphasize points and students can hear this emphasis and intonation, things that can't be captured in comments inserted in a Word document or an e-mail message.

Be Strategic—All screencasts should have two goals: to provide valuable, basic information to students and to drive students to the career center for deeper conversations. Always provide the suggestion at the end of the screencast that the viewer go to the career center for more information.

Kevin Monahan will present "Using Screencasts to Provide 21st Century Career Services" as a concurrent session during the NACE 2015 Conference.